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September 2, 2005

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Bush:

As our nation bands together to help those who have lost so much in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, we would like to thank you for all that your Administration has recently done. This is obviously a horrible situation, one of the worst in our nation's history, and we must work every minute of every day to help those people in need. However, in addition to the \$10.5 billion in emergency appropriations we approved today to help with disaster and victim assistance, there are other issues of growing importance; particularly those related to gasoline supply and cost.

We ask that your Administration continue to pay careful attention to the impact this disaster has had on the United States' energy supply and, therefore, the affect that it is having on oil and gas prices nationwide. In the past week alone, gas prices have doubled in some areas and we are seeing dry pumps, long lines, and in some cases hourly price changes. We stand ready to help in any way we can.

Your decision to authorize releases of Strategic Petroleum Reserve crude oil was an important step in addressing this crisis and we are encouraged that the restriction on our ability to import extra stocks of both crude oil and refined products has been removed. However, much still needs to be done to get refineries, whose operations were interrupted by the storm, back on-line; transporting crude oil and refined products throughout the U.S.; monitoring possible price gouging at the pump; and, the need for a more comprehensive and balanced energy strategy for the future.

First, no matter how much crude oil we receive from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, we will continue to face great difficulties in getting gas to the consumer unless these refineries are working again. Considering that nine major and three smaller refinery facilities in Louisiana and Mississippi are closed, that together constitute 12.4 percent of total U.S. capacity, we believe it is critical to understand the extent of the damage to production, refinery and transport operations. What is the plan for bringing these functions back online as soon as possible?

Second, we worry about the pipeline transport of crude oil and refined products as a result of Hurricane Katrina. What can we do to ensure all pipelines are fully functioning? And, if they are not, that the pipelines are opened in a timely manner?

Third, in the hours, days and weeks ahead, we must continue to collect information and focus on the many diverse factors that are affecting oil and gas prices nationwide. One trend that is particularly troubling is the potential for gasoline distributors and retailers to take advantage of this crisis by engaging in gouging and price fixing. While we realize that there is not a "federally declared energy emergency" in the nation, exorbitant price gouging of gas prices may lead to a perception that there is. What can be done to protect consumers and also states that are not in a declared state of emergency? Can the U.S. Attorney General provide greater oversight and ensure the states are actively monitoring enforcement of laws that guard against abuse?

The gas price increases in the wake of Hurricane Katrina come on top of a 40 percent rise in gas prices last year. While the immediate emergency at hand needs to be dealt with, we must band together to find solutions to reduce our dependency on foreign oil and create a more comprehensive and balanced energy strategy for the future.

We would appreciate an update on these key issues from the appropriate Departments and Agencies within your Cabinet as soon as possible. As you know, consumers are very concerned and have every right to be. We owe them answers.

Mike Castle

Sincerely,

Michael J. Stipanovich

~~Frank A. LoBianco~~

Frank A. LoBianco

Norman Y. Mineta

Heather Z. Zeman

Samuel W. Bodman

Phil Engle

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cc: The Honorable Alberto Gonzales, Attorney General of the United States
The Honorable Norman Y. Mineta, Secretary, U.S. Department of Transportation
The Honorable Samuel W. Bodman, Secretary, U.S. Department of Energy
The Honorable Joe Barton, Chairman, House Committee on Energy and Commerce

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